

**Berea Stories**  
Lyle D. Roelofs  
President's Remarks  
Opening Convocation  
August 29, 2019

Thank you Ishara , Eileen, Luke, Carl, Je'Dynn, and Ashley. The groups each of you so thoughtfully and graciously represented in your remarks are all essential parts of Our Berea. *The Book of Berea*, will certainly be amazing, when we get around to publishing it.

And thanks as well to the amazing singers from our combined choirs and their leaders. **[lead applause]** I should note that many first-year students and seniors, 35 first-years and 13 seniors, in fact, gave up the opportunity to march with classmates in order to be part of presenting that amazing musical number. You are back in the upper seating section, but please know how much we appreciated your gift to all of us.

- Members of the senior class, you students who will complete your studies this year, marched in together and we look forward to celebrating with you at Mid-year or at the end of the academic year.

**Ishara, thanks for your leadership of the SGA and for sharing your story of bringing two cultural identities into our beloved**

**community and making yourself an exemplar of our unity in diversity.**

- And you first year students are looking forward to great accomplishments, too. **I know that you all join Je'Dynn in the excitement of what you will do with the challenge of Berea College.**
- You faculty bring learning to life, and treasure and reflect what you learn in return from staff and students. **Eileen, thanks for encouraging students to follow their passions and to explore broadly in the Berea curriculum and the world through travel.**
- Staff members, you make this whole place work and play a key role in the education of students, through the Labor Program and the powerful example of your own Berea stories. **Luke, thanks for sharing that story of the transformation of a shy, soft-spoken guy, who arrived letting his jump shot do the talking, but graduated ready to tell the Berea story to many others.**
- Retirees from the College, you bless us with your continuing engagement and involvement, and in so doing, ground us more firmly in our heritage and traditions. **Carl, thanks for all those teasers, the stories you couldn't share, given your time limitations. And for the great advice. Make your bed every morning, then engage in the myriad of opportunities on campus, and exercise discipline each day.**

- Our alumni stay engaged to inspire us all with their accomplishments and to be helpful to following generations of Berea graduates. **Ashley, thanks for sharing and I'll repeat your advice, too. "Be sure your advisor knows your heart!" and "Enjoy the diversity of Berea! Talk to each other and learn from one another!"**

We ask the first-year students and the seniors to march in this opening convocation, because you are the bookends of the student experience at Berea College, the start and the first fulfillment of student stories at Berea! But transfer students, sophomores and juniors are all adding to their stories, too.

- New transfer students, can I ask you all to stand up? We welcome you. Even if you started somewhere else, you have decided to become Bereans and we welcome you and your broader perspectives with open arms. **[Applause]** You can be seated.
- Sophomores, will you stand up? We all know that the most challenging year for a college student is his or her first year. We are very proud that you have taken on those challenges successfully and will be building on that success this year. **[Applause]** You can be seated.
- Juniors, please stand up. You have even more successes and accomplishments, so we applaud you, too, and can already imagine you processing in this event next fall! **[Applause]** You may be seated.

There is a line in a poem, by Muriel Rukeyser, American poet and social justice warrior, that is apropos to the theme of this convo, “The universe is made of stories, not of atoms.” Of course, I and my fellow scientists are quite certain that there are, in fact, some atoms around, too, here and there, but maybe Ms. Rukeyser was correct that the meaning that constitutes the Universe comes from the stories that are being lived out, that the reality of Berea College, for example, is best captured through the stories of Bereans. Elsewhere, she also says, “All the poems of our lives are not yet made,” and one could say, too, that *The Book of Berea*, is continuing to be written, day by day, year by year through the experiences and activities of all Bereans.

As President of Berea College one of my favorite roles is to serve as the chief story teller of the College. In addition to the great stories you heard today, and to your own, I could add the one about the Berea students who were the first to introduce computers to the administration of the College and wrote the program to run the College payroll; or the basketball player who was the first African American to play for any college or university in Kentucky and all that his coach and teammates did to confront the racist responses they encountered everywhere; or the student who arrived not knowing how to read, and so was first taught how by some fellow students; or, my favorite, which I also mentioned last year, the story of Elizabeth Rogers,

wife of J. A. R. Rogers, our first Dean of Faculty, who, not as confident in the efficacy of non-violent responses to the local opposition as were her husband and Rev. Fee, armed herself with chemical weapons from the laboratory of the school;. The list would go on and on.

*The Book of Berea* tells a grand story. In chronological organization, we would find the early chapters to be suspenseful and scary; in later chapters the stories reveal the emerging consciousness of a great and unique mission; and the chapters being written now show a school continuing to be true to those commitments and to write great living poetry. I do not know if *The Book of Berea* will be published between covers, but what a thrill to be writing it together with you all!

Thank you!

**[Important note for next year: it did not work to put the video at the end; it will need to be integrated into my remarks.]**

I now invite Rev. Loretta Reynolds to offer a departing blessing on our gathering. Following her benediction, I have some instructions for you and then we will join in celebrating our stories and our community, singing our *alma mater*, "Berea, Beloved," led by the great faculty voices of Berea's Music

Program. The words and music are on the back of your program and will also be projected on the screens.

**[Rev. Reynolds]**

Thank you so much, Rev. Reynolds.

Now, a couple of announcements...

First, after we conclude here, you are invited to a picnic dinner on the Quad. As we process out of this place, Dr. Javier Clavere will be playing the Carillon.

Students, please have your **ID ready to be scanned for Convo credit as you leave:** And here is how you will exit...

1. First-year students and Seniors: use the lower-level exit doors to your left (front and back) **[point]**
2. Sophomores & Juniors: go to the two exits located in the back. **[point]**

Now, I will ask the music faculty to come up to lead us in singing the alma mater. Students who sing in our choirs are ready to help you fill this arena with our song!